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DEPARTMENT FOR WHA/CAR (BENT)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/27/2016

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [WHTI](#) [JM](#)

SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S COURTESY CALL ON OPPOSITION LEADER
BRUCE GOLDING

REF: 05 KINGSTON 1346

Classified By: Ambassador Brenda LaGrange Johnson. Reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. Summary: During the Ambassador's January 17 courtesy call on Leader of the Opposition Bruce Golding and senior Jamaica Labor Party (JLP) MPs Karl Samuda (JLP Chairman) and Ed Bartlett (shadow tourism minister), Golding lamented what he described as Jamaica's diminished importance to the USG, and expressed concern at the GOJ/Venezuela PetroCaribe agreement, and about Jamaica's high debt-to-GDP levels. Samuda faulted the GOJ for its inability to get a handle on Jamaica's record homicide rate, while Bartlett worried about the likely effects on Jamaica's tourism sector of implementation of the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI). With the ruling Peoples National Party internal election campaign heating up, and the prospect of general elections looming thereafter, Golding is positioning himself domestically and vis-a-vis the USG for what will likely be a bruising electoral campaign. End Summary.

¶2. (C) On January 17, the Ambassador called on Leader of the Opposition Bruce Golding, at the Jamaica Labor Party's (JLP) Kingston headquarters. JLP Chairman Karl Samuda and shadow tourism minister Ed Bartlett joined Golding, while P/ECouns (notetaker) accompanied the Ambassador. Following brief welcoming remarks, Golding lamented what he characterized as Jamaica's diminished importance to the U.S. since the end of the Cold War. Without explicitly saying so, Golding was referring to Jamaica's pro-Washington orientation during the 1980-89 administration of Edward Seaga, Jamaica's last JLP prime minister. The Ambassador acknowledged that the world is very different in 2006 than it was in 1989, and that Iraq and Afghanistan were of necessity higher priorities for the USG. She assured Golding, however, that Jamaica remains important to the USG, noting the Secretary's proposed March visit to Nassau to meet with CARICOM leaders as a sign of Washington's desire to engage with Jamaica and the region.

¶3. (C) Golding expressed concern about the GOJ's PetroCaribe agreement with Venezuela, wondering aloud "what IOU's are being stored up" as a result. Then, noting Jamaica's high debt-to-GDP ratio, he wondered aloud how a future government would be able to continue managing Jamaica's massive debt. The Ambassador replied that there was little chance that Venezuela is offering its largesse with no strings attached. She also told Golding that she was very interested in the debt issue.

¶4. (C) Noting Jamaica's record homicide rate during 2005, Golding criticized the GOJ for its inability to master the crime situation. Samuda asked pointedly whether USG assistance to the GOJ and its security forces had "failed",

particularly as, he continued, U.S.-origin firearms, illegally imported to Jamaica, were behind much of the violence plaguing the country. In reply, the Ambassador and P/ECouns outlined multifaceted USG assistance, including close USG/GOJ counternarcotics cooperation; training and material assistance to the Jamaica Defense Force (JDF); training for the Jamaica Constabulary Force (JCF); and cooperation with the JCF (via RSO to ATF) in tracing serial numbers of illegal firearms seized by the Jamaican authorities. Samuda seemed genuinely surprised at the extent of cooperation.

¶15. (C) Bartlett, whose parliamentary constituency includes the tourism-dependent north coast city of Montego Bay, expressed gratitude that the USG had "granted a stay of execution" by extending the implementation date for the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI) by one year. He, Golding, and Samuda unanimously opined that WHTI, even with the extended deadline, would have serious negative implications for Jamaica's tourism industry, given the relatively small percentage of Amcits who possess passports. Golding asked whether there was any "wiggle room" to delay further, or suspend, implementation for Jamaica. The Ambassador replied firmly that WHTI was a necessary measure for the USG and that it would be implemented fully, including for Jamaica-bound travelers. PolEconCouns briefly outlined WHA/CAR Director Brian Nichols's 2005 discussions of WHTI with GOJ officials (Reftel), and said that the USG is well aware of Jamaica's concerns vis-a-vis WHTI.

Comment

¶16. (C) Golding used the brief but cordial meeting to seek the Ambassador's reassurance that the USG has not written off Jamaica, and to register a desire to see closer relations between the USG and the GOJ. His unspoken message seemed to be that any future government he led would make closer bilateral relations a priority. With the governing People's National Party undergoing a contentious internal leadership succession process, and the possibility that the PNP leader who emerges as prime minister will call early elections, Golding is seeking to position himself - domestically and vis-a-vis the USG - for what is sure to be a bruising political campaign ahead. Post will report septel on how that campaign is shaping up.

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